

IOWA OUTDOORS

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
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SICK BASS FOUND IN THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

GUTTENBERG – Fisheries workers conducting routine autumn surveys have seen a number of largemouth bass with open wounds at over-wintering areas in Pools 10 and 11 on the Mississippi River. Overall, 22 percent of bass collected had skin lesions but infection rate was as high as 38 percent at some locations. Several diseased fish were sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fish Health Center in LaCrosse, Wis.

Preliminary laboratory tests indicated that these fish suffered from a variety of bacterial infections. The principle infectious agent was a bacterium called *Aeromonas hydrophila* but other bacteria were present (not all have been identified as of yet).

In addition, virus testing also detected the presence of largemouth bass virus (LMBV). This pathogen was detected earlier this summer on Pools 3 and 7 by the LaCrosse Center and it appears to be a new fish virus on the Mississippi River. LMBV has been previously detected in 17 states including Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

For anglers, eating fish infected with these organisms does not pose a known threat to human health. Largemouth bass virus has only been reported from cold-blooded animals (fish, reptiles and amphibians). However, anglers should heed common sense by properly cooking all fish and not consuming dead or sick fish. In addition, they should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water after fishing.

The primary reason for this disease outbreak is probably due to stress, said Scott Gritters, Iowa DNR fisheries biologist at Guttenberg. Stress can lower the fish's natural defenses against disease. Bass living in the Mississippi River may encounter a variety of stressful conditions including poor water quality, repeated handling by anglers, long

distance movements to overwintering areas and crowded conditions in backwater habitats.

To survive the winter conditions in the Mississippi River, bass use lakes that are too deep to freeze to the bottom and have little or no water current flowing through them. This type of backwater habitat is becoming very limited on the river due to siltation. Bass have been found to move up to eight miles to get to these high quality overwintering areas. In addition, since these areas are so limited, thousands of fish crowd into them. Excessive crowding and movements elevate stress levels, weaken the immune system, and permit the rapid transmission of diseases among fish.

Ice anglers who come across fish with lesions are asked to notify a local fisheries biologist. In this way, fisheries scientists can track this outbreak and document its impact on the Mississippi River fishery. Because diseased fish were collected within areas of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, fishery biologists are also working with refuge staff to document and seek solutions to this problem.

For further information, contact Scott Gritters with the Iowa DNR 563-252-1156, Pat Short with the Wisconsin DNR 608-326-8818, Pam Thiel with the Fish and Wildlife Service 608-783-8431, or John Lindell with the refuge office 563-873-3423.

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FOUR MEN PLEADED GUILTY IN DEER POACHING CASE

OSCEOLA – Four individuals pleaded guilty to taking deer illegally during the first deer season after a landowner in Clarke County called in a tip to DNR conservation officer Craig Roberg.

The men charged were Robert Caughron, 39, Newport, Tenn., John Holloway, 41, Newport, Tenn., Charles E. Black, 35, Hartford, Tenn., and William B. Allen, 31, Candler, N.C.

Roberg received a call on Dec. 7 from a landowner who saw “three or four people” hanging a deer on a fence between two fields. When the men left, the landowner checked out the deer and discovered it did not have a deer hunting tag on it.

Roberg watched the deer until Dec. 10 when the men returned. They retrieved the deer and headed back to a farm where they were storing their equipment. There, Roberg watched them retrieve two more deer and head to their motel in Osceola. Roberg, assisted by conservation officers Rich Schlutz, Craig Cutts, Kirby Bragg, Craig Lonneman and Lon Lindenberg, then confronted the men and issued the charges.

Caughron told officers he shot all three deer. Caughron was charged with two counts of over harvesting deer, one count of taking a deer with a rifle, one count of hunting without blaze orange and one count of hunting with a two-way radio.

Holloway was charged with hunting with a two-way radio and taking deer illegally. Black and Allen were each charged with hunting with a two-way radio and hunting without a license.

“They all had knowledge and all participated in the illegal activity, so they were all charged as accessories,” Roberg said.

The DNR confiscated a Honda Rancher All-Terrain Vehicle, a trailer, four shotguns, one rifle and the deer. The men pleaded guilty and paid nearly \$4,300 in fines and damages.

For more information, contact Lon Lindenberg at 515-238-5008 or at 515-367-2100.

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EARLY ICE, BEST FISHING

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

It doesn't take much before the lake gets crowded. A couple inches of ice, and a solitary figure appears, perched on his bucket. Soon there's another. Then more. Another inch or so and the portable ice houses start popping up.

The first wintry blasts of the year herald the arrival of ice fishing season. Sometimes, it'll last nearly four months. Other years, like last winter, it's here and gone. One of the busiest places in Iowa is Bussey Lake, upstream from the Guttenberg Lock and Dam.

Over the weekend there, it seemed like most of the community was deer hunting. But there were still 20 ice shacks dotting the ice over the dredge cut at the north end of the off-channel lake. “The first ones were out two weeks ago Monday,” Karen Aulwes recalls. The Department of Natural Resources fisheries technician there, Aulwes says ‘first ice’ fishing is always pretty good. “There have been a lot of nice 7-inch bluegills caught,” she reports. “A few smaller ones, too. Not many crappies, yet, though.”

Ice fishing in Iowa is mostly a panfish affair. Bluegills are the staple at most lakes, ponds and river backwaters. Ray Fuller pulled in his share, over the weekend. “We had real good luck,” smiles Fuller, of Marion. “We had to sort (throw back smaller ones) a lot, but we ended up with about 50 ‘gills and a few crappies.” He was fishing on top of

the dredge cut on Bussey; part of the million dollar plus management program, which restored critical fish habitat on the silted clogged basin in the mid 90s.

With his hovercraft, uncertain ice was no problem for Dennis Wilgenbusch. The Dyersville angler just skimmed across the backwater lakes. The dinner plate shaped 10-inch bluegill sitting atop a pile of nice, six to eight inch bluegills were a fish fry waiting to happen.

Across Iowa, the ice fishing wave is picking up steam; so to speak. Ice anglers were out on Clear Lake this weekend. I noticed outlines from a couple refrozen holes near the power lines, on Lake Macbride as I drove by the other day. "People just like to get out on that first ice," relays Paul Sleeper, the DNR's area fisheries biologist based at Macbride. "It seems like the fishing is really good that first time you can get out; before the fish move into that deeper water." Sleeper says panfish stick around in the shallow water, at about 10 to 15 foot depth just as the lake is freezing. Later in the season, they work into the deeper water; a degree or two warmer than the rest. It doesn't sound like much, but to a cold-blooded fish, it's an aquatic heat wave.

And with those chilled, slow moving fish...a light touch is the difference between a bucket of bluegills and a day spent sitting in the cold. "Generally, you want to use one to two pound test line; smaller lures, smaller baits," suggests Sleeper. "Those fish don't have to eat much through the winter to sustain themselves. You want to go with really light line. The new 'ice lines' are nearly invisible. They are also more pliable. Warm season line can get stiff and hard to handle in the frigid ice fishing zone."

Safety, of course, remains important. A mishap is bad enough in warm weather. A bitter cold winter day is unforgiving, though. It can turn it to tragedy. You can reduce the threat of danger, by 'reading' the ice. "Early in the season, especially, the in the upper ends of a lake, it might freeze," explains Sleeper. "Here at Macbride, the upper end froze almost a week before the main lake iced over. You could be on safe ice, and find yourself walking over pockets that might have just a half inch, an inch of ice. Snow cover is deceiving also. You can't see the color changes of the ice, when snow lies on top of it," says Sleeper.

In general, fresh, clear-bluish ice is best. Near a current or toward the end of the ice fishing season, dark, honeycomb ice spells bad news. Even with good ice, take along basic survival gear; a float coat or lifejacket, spud bar to thump the ice, ice picks or some other tool in case you must pull yourself out of an icy hole.

Of course, your best survival tool is another person out there with you.

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DNR TO CONTINUE COLLECTING DEER TISSUE SAMPLES

MANCHESTER – The Iowa DNR will be collecting deer tissue samples through the end of the second shotgun deer season. The DNR will not have collection stations this weekend, but will be searching out hunting parties and collecting the samples on site.

“It is important for hunters in Allamakee, Dubuque and Jackson counties to call their local biologist if they harvest a deer. We will be trying to connect with hunting parties in the field, rather than have them come to us,” said Bob Dolan, DNR regional wildlife supervisor for northeast Iowa.

Hunters in Allamakee should call Bob Kurtt at 563-380-3422. Hunters in Dubuque and Jackson counties should call Bob Sheets at 563-357-2035. Clayton County should reach its quota of 500 samples this week.

“We will continue to collect samples from other counties until the quotas are reached. Hunters should contact their local wildlife biologist to see if the county has reached its quota,” Dolan said.

A map and phone number for wildlife management biologists is listed on page 3 of the 2002 Iowa Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Regulations.

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